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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the conceptual basis for a research study of thirty-seven societies to investigate the educational function of initiation ceremonies and secret societies. "Hidden curriculum" is the term chosen for the precepts passed on within certain cultural institutions of a society. The author hypothesizes that in a tribal society, the hidden curriculum will function in the form of tribal initiation to inculcate an egalitarian consciousness and that in a chiefdom it will function as a secret society that will articulate individuals on the basis of social differentiation; thus, the contrasting aspects of the institutions are seen to be indicative of the type of societal organization. In the stratified state with a formal class structure articulation of individuals would be determined initially by birth and later by various secondary mechanisms of a limited, nonsecret nature. The formal hypotheses drawn from these ideas are borne out by the research study. Correlation coefficients between the variables for the study are found in an appendix. (JH)

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EXPLORATIONS IN CULTURAL PREMISES OF SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION[1]

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[1]This paper is based on a study reported in Precourt, 1974.

Using a sample of 37 societies this study is a cross-cultural analysis of initiation ceremonies and secret societies as educational institutions. While many attempts have been made to explain the functions of these institutions, little attempt has been made to investigate their educational functions. The reason for this is apparently because the notion of education as used traditionally has often been used in a very limited sense to refer to the direct instruction of substantive knowledge (see Herzog 1962 and Young 1965). Because this form of education has often been thought (often mistakenly) to be absent in initiation ceremonies, it was felt by many authors that little or no educational activity occurred during these ceremonies.

Only recently has education been viewed with a broader perspective to encompass all forms of cultural transmission (see Gearing 1972a and 1972b). It is, therefore, now possible to see the educational functions of initiations from many new and different perspectives. It is out of this latter conceptualization of education that the ideas presented in this paper were conceived.

With this in mind, the conceptual basis of this paper can now be discussed. The key notion used in this paper is that in certain cultural settings there are protocols in which activity occurs that inculcates basic cultural precepts. I refer to this phenomena as hidden curriculum.

In light of the notion hidden curriculum, the function and structure of initiation ceremonies is considered in two respects. First of all, it is theorized that in egalitarian tribal societies hidden curriculum will serve to articulate members of a society on horizontal or equal basis. In chiefdom societies with incipient stratification, on the other hand, hidden curriculum will serve to articulate society members on the basis of social differentiation. It is argued that tribal initiations function in the former situation while secret societies function in the latter.

In all societies there must exist a mechanism for articulating a member of society into the broader socio-political universe. Although the family operates in many areas where cultural transmission is necessary, it does not suffice in most instances for purposes of this wider articulation. The main reason for this is because kinship is generally not broad enough in scope to inculcate the dimension of the wider society; it can teach wider social principles but this is something quite different from articulation with the behavioral transaction dimensions of these principles.

The notion of "schemas" presented by Meyer Fortes (1938) exemplifies this situation. According to this idea, a child learning kinship terms, for example, learns at a very early age some of the various kinship categories and some of the terminology associated with these categories. It is not until the child gets older and actually becomes associated with the individuals represented in this kinship system, however, that the real meaning of the kinship terminology becomes clear, and the schema, as it were, is filled in. In extending this concept, at least as an analogy, to the wider society it becomes obvious that merely teaching a child the concepts associated with the wider social universe is not enough to make that child articulate into the universe.

In tribal societies, as was discussed above, socio-political organization is egalitarian; therefore, as an adult, the individual must function on an equal basis with other members of the tribe, i.e., he must articulate horizontally to members of his tribal group. An educational institution that could perform such a task would be expected to emphasize community solidarity and equality. It would be expected to bring the individual face-to-face, so to speak, with the community, i.e. interrelate the individual with the "public" as a unit. I hypothesize that in tribal societies such an institution in fact exists;

this is the initiation ceremony. I further hypothesize that such ceremonies will be characterized by activity that emphasizes egalitarianism among those initiated and solidarity between the initiates and other members of the society. It is the theme of egalitarianism that I feel constitutes the essence of hidden curriculum as it operates in tribal initiations.

In chiefdoms, the socio-political structure is somewhat different than in tribal societies. At this level of cultural integration, the egalitarian principle no longer prevails but there now exists what I have termed incipient stratification. In chiefdom societies, therefore, it would be expected that an educational institution would be present that would inculcate the notion of stratification. I hypothesize that the institution that carries out this function is the secret society and its associated initiations. A mechanism such as the secret society is necessary since there is no formal class structure with its institutionalized sanctions that can serve to integrate a society member according to the principle of differentiation. It can be noted that Hutton Webster (1968; orig. 1932) observed that in some instances secret societies apparently have actually replaced initiations where a society's social integration has changed from the tribal to the chiefdom level.

Stratified state level societies contrast to chiefdoms in that they usually have a formal class structure, either economic or political. As such, the mechanisms for articulating the individual with the wider socio-political universe are to some degree built into the structure of society. That is, one is articulated, at least initially, into the wider socio-political system by virtue of his family's social position. Thus, at birth, and via one's kinship group, one is "fitted" into the society's stratification structure. Furthermore, there are other secondary mechanisms for social articulation including, for example, formal educational institutions. It is argued here, therefore, that

initiation ceremonies and secret societies do not exist as educational institutions at the state level because they are unnecessary, and in fact they are perhaps inappropriate. This does not rule out the fact that initiations and secret societies often exist in state societies. The function of such institutions, however, is often rather specialized and is of little significance when considered on a society-wide basis. It can also be noted that very often secret societies present at the state level come into direct conflict with official governmental principles and policies (see Webster 1964). For these reasons, it is suggested that initiations that do exist in state societies will tend to be open and initiation will be into limited non-secret associations (see coding definitions, Precourt, 1974.) Subversive secret institutions are not considered in this study.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses that were tested can now be stated. The first is concerned with the relationship between type of initiation and level of cultural integration. The first hypothesis is as follows: Initiation ceremonies will exist at the tribal level of socio-cultural complexity while secret societies will exist in chiefdoms. The second hypothesis is concerned with the structure of the various initiations and can be stated as follows: Initiation ceremonies in tribal societies will emphasize equality among the initiates, while secret societies in chiefdoms will emphasize differentiation. It would also be expected that initiations that occurred in state societies would tend to be open and that the associations entered would tend to be limited-non-secret.

Findings

The statistical findings support the two hypotheses (Appendix). Public initiations tend to be associated with tribal societies and secret societies tend to be associated with chiefdoms. Furthermore, secret societies tend to be associated with differentiation while public initiations tend to lack differentiation. The correlation coefficients between these variables are presented on the attached sheet.

Conclusions

The conclusion drawn in regard to the hypotheses is that there are definite differences in initiations as they exist in tribal societies as opposed to chiefdoms. The differences are not only in the general structure of initiation, but they are also in the internal structure in terms of the presence or absence of differentiation patterns. It is, therefore, felt that the contrasting equality/differentiation characteristics of the initiations represent hidden curriculum protocols which convey different cultural premises.

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APPENDIX I

STATISTICAL FINDINGS

I. Correlation between level of political complexity and type of initiation and association.

	Public Initi.	Open Initi.	Secret Initi.	Society-Wide Assoc.	Limited Assoc.	Secret Assoc.	Secret & Limited Assoc.
Tribe	.3927 (.0313)*	-.2333 (.1613)	.0407 (.4338)	.3170 (.0643)	-.1808 (.3764)	.0036 (.3527)	-.0984 (.4154)
Chief-dom	-.1586 (.3045)	.2271 (.1593)	.2271 (.1593)	-.1898 (.2121)	.2891 (.1247)	.2782 (.0943)	.4249 (.0133)
State	-.1935 (.3167)	.0625 (.4520)	-.2677 (.1273)	-.0166 (.3589)	-.1307 (.5785)	-.2862 (.0990)	-.3432 (.0434)

*Level of probability N = 37

II. Correlation between presence or absence of differentiation pattern (hidden curriculum) and presence of initiation ceremonies and societies (see Footnote 1).

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation Coeff. (Tau B)	Level Of Probability	N
Differentiation	Public Initiation	-.5052	.0198	26
Differentiation	Secret Association	.4625	.0283	26